



# Diversity Digest

**Limited Edition**

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## “IT IS TIME TO WALK THE WALK”

**Colonel Tod Bunting**  
*Director of Diversity, Personnel & Training*

This Diversity Digest is a cornerstone of our kickoff as a reenergized and refocused initiative to ensure the ANG is truly a Diverse organization. So, let's cut to the chase right here in paragraph one. IT IS TIME TO WALK THE WALK. We have done plenty of talking the last few years, and talk is good. It is an essential element of good communications and learning. We have completed our awareness phase of Diversity. But the time is here to actually do something, or Walk the Walk. It is a big path with a general direction to head in, but with lots of paths to choose from. So, come along with us as we travel to the future ANG.

Together we serve in a truly historic era of the ANG with unprecedented involvement around the globe. We have more of our people mobilized in the last 2 years than at any time other than the Korean War. We are not just observers of history as it is made, we are all part of it, and our challenge is to remain an essential element of our ANG.



**Colonel Tod Bunting**

Our immediate challenge is to clarify our role at Wing and State level, and to maximize our contribution to our leadership as well as each and every member of the ANG. Those are not just nice sounding words or a lofty goal; they are a wake up call to action. Failing to clarify who we are and what we do will jeopardize our very existence. To me, we maximize our people's performance and assist Commanders to ensure their units represent the communities that surround them. When done properly, we get the right person, to the right place, at the right time.

Ready, Reliable, Relevant. No problem overall, but we will need some extra attention to keep this true. The ANG has always maintained high levels of readiness and reliability. No small feat in the past when our equipment and funding levels were not what they could have been, but we have always been there when called.

Relevant is also an area where we have a decent track record; where we must place additional emphasis as the nation we live and serve in has and continues to change. To remain relevant, we must be representative of our fellow citizens. As of today, we are not where we need to be in some areas. We are making modest progress, but to become truly representative, we must pick up the pace or we will never reach our desired levels of inclusiveness.

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*("It is Time to Walk the Walk "continued from page 1)*

We have always had the great strength in the ANG of diversity of occupation. Every unit I have served in has had a wide degree of diversity in job status, level of education, age, etc. The only area where we were not as diverse as we should have been was ethnicity and gender. We had every occupation one could imagine, and we used these strengths to get things done, often using members' civilian skills to help out where we did not have the skills on the UMD. All that is left is to make sure that a snapshot of the unit looks remarkably similar to a snapshot of the community surrounding the unit.

Our task is not to build a new rocket, but to simply be the National Guard; specifically, the National Guard of each of our 54 states, territories, Districts and Commonwealths. We are America's home team. No other Air component has a major presence in all 54 states and territories. When America sees someone in blue, chances are they are seeing one of us. We need, to the best of our abilities, to be a reflection of our audience.

## LET ME INTRODUCE MYSELF

**(The bio of our new Chief of OHRE for Diversity)**

### **LIEUTENANT COLONEL BRUCE J. STEWART**

Lt Col Bruce J. Stewart is the Chief, Diversity and Office of Human Resources and Enhancement (OHRE). The primary emphasis of the OHRE is to increase ANG mission effectiveness through improving ANG Human Performance.



Lt Col Stewart enlisted in the United States Air Force in 1980 as an Air Traffic Controller. Thereafter he was selected for a special duty assignment as an Enlisted Close Air Support Specialist. He was stationed at Ft Bragg army post as a jump qualified parachutist.

In 1983, Lt Col Stewart retrained into the Manpower Management Engineering field where he served as a Manpower specialist for three years at Seymour Johnson AFB. He then enlisted into the Kansas Army National Guard in 1986 and served as an Auditor for the United States Property and Fiscal Office. In 1988, Lt Col Stewart transferred to the 190 ARW Supply organization where he received his commission as a second lieutenant and graduated in the top ten percent of his class.

In 1989, Lt Col Stewart was selected as the Military Personnel Management Officer at State HQs Kansas Air National Guard. In August of 1990 he was transferred to the Air National Guard Readiness Center, Andrews AFB to work on several Manpower authorization studies. After completing those projects, Lt Col Stewart, in 1992 was selected as the Commander of the Communications Flight at the 184FW, McConnell AFB. In 1995, he transferred to the 190ARW as the Communication Flight Commander. During his time as a Communications Commander Lt Col Stewart served as the Communications Flight Council Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson for four years. In 1999, Lt Col Stewart was assigned as the fulltime Diversity Officer for the Kansas Air National Guard.

Lt Col Stewart has served and been involved in numerous Diversity initiatives at both the state and national levels. At the state level Lt Col Stewart was the State Diversity Improvement Coordinator (SDIC) for both the Army and Air Guard in Kansas. At the national level Lt Col Stewart was a member of the People Potential 2000 & Beyond (PP2B) team that created the first ANG Diversity Strategic Plan. He is also a Diversity Master Educator and an ANG Mentoring Program Process Coordinator.

Lt Col Stewart is an Adjunct Professor and has taught various classes over the years. These classes include Diversity, Leadership, Management, Economics, Government, Marketing, and a variety of Computer courses.

#### **Education:**

1985 Bachelor of Science degree in Industrial Engineering from Southern Illinois University

1996 Squadron Officer School, graduated as outstanding performer

1999 Masters of Science degree in Management of Information Systems from Friends University, Wichita, Kansas.

## Allow Me To Share a Few Of My Thoughts

I am pleased to have this opportunity to share a few of my thoughts as your new Chief, Office of Human Resources Enhancement (OHRE), for Diversity. I am excited to be involved with the Air National Guard (ANG) Diversity Initiative and all of the human resource challenges we face in the future.

To help the ANG achieve the Director's vision and mission of establishing a Ready, Reliable, and Relevant force the OHRE must position itself as a value added that is critical to ANG mission success.

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*("Allow Me To Share My Thoughts" continued from page 2)*

In today's environment of rapid change and multiple threats we must develop a new approach to remain relevant. It is no secret that most workforce diversity initiatives over the long term have been less than successful. I feel that a "new way of thinking" is required if we are to truly create an ANG that is thoroughly diverse at all levels of the organization. Since I have become the Chief, OHRE, I have received several inquiries about the future direction of the OHRE and ANG Diversity Initiative. Below I have listed some of these questions and provided my views and perspectives as to what I think will be the dominant issues surrounding the ANG Diversity Initiative.

#### ***What is the Future of Diversity Within the ANG?***

I believe the future is bright, but it will not be without some serious challenges. Our military and the ANG are facing an operations tempo rate that is stretching resources and manpower to the critical point. As such, some people do not see the need to emphasize diversity because they cannot see the direct correlation to mission readiness. They can't be more wrong. In our current operations environment of asymmetric threats, terrorist networks, ubiquitous technology, Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), and easy to get biological weapons, it is imperative that our ANG members are trained and educated to deal with the myriad of new threats and scenarios. Particularly important is the fact that ANG personnel are being deployed to all corners of the world, and as a result, encountering cultures significantly different than their own. Understanding different cultures and being able to function in a Joint environment are necessary skills that ANG members must master.

On a more strategic level, in the future Diversity in the ANG will be less about race and gender and more about knowledge and information sharing. We must integrate diversity into a broader plan aimed at improving our Human Performance. As Department of Defense (DoD) and Office of Personnel Management (OPM) have stated, "our Human Capital."

#### ***What is Human Capital?***

The term Human Capital refers to the notion that an organization must regard investment in its people with the same care and emphasis as they regard an investment in technology and weapon systems. However, I prefer the term Human Performance to Human Capital. It just sounds—more human.

#### ***Why is Human Performance so important and what does it have to do with Diversity?***

Human Performance is important as our world becomes more complex because mission accomplishments and failures will be based on the performance of our people. Our senior leadership recognizes this dilemma; thus the emphasis on human performance. Human performance and diversity are tightly interwoven. Human performance initiatives and goals focus on improving the performance of our members. Diversity is geared towards removing barriers that inhibit a member's performance and effectiveness. In addition, members skilled and educated in managing and identifying the dimensions of diversity are better prepared to function at an optimal level in the complex environment of the future.

#### ***So, where are we now in terms of Diversity in the ANG?***

In terms of numbers, our levels of minorities and females have increased about five percent across the board. However, our racial and gender diversity has shown little improvement in the last ten years across the field grade officer levels and the senior enlisted levels. This will be a key focus area for us in the future.

#### ***What kind of roadmap or plan will we use to get us from point A to B?***

We will be developing a Human Performance Plan that will guide us for the next five years. Our plan will be closely aligned with ANG Directors Vanguard Vision, and the Air Force's Force Development and Diversity Strategic Plans.

***"Instead 21st Century diversity in the military will focus on thinking styles, being able to operate in a joint environment, understanding emotional intelligence, and developing the skills to operate and flourish in an asymmetric environment with multiple threats."***

#### ***What role do you see for the Human Resources Advisors (HRAs) in the future?***

The Human Resources Advisors (HRAs) are absolutely the most important component of our Diversity Initiative. If we are going to be successful at implementing diversity at all levels of the ANG, it will be directly related to the tenacity, skill, knowledge, and commitment of our HRAs. We intend to provide our HRAs with the tools and resources they require to add value to their respective Wing's and states, and give them the education and training they need to be successful. I really believe that we at the OHRE, should do a much better job at supporting our HRAs. Chief Master Sergeant Derrik Allen, HRA Program Manager, is doing a great job of managing the HRA program. He comes to us with a myriad of skills and knowledge. Chief Allen has 20 years of experience with the Air Force active duty and Air National Guard. His most recent assignments include ANGRC First Sergeant, and executive non-commissioned officer to the Director, ANG. He has a great attitude and is an expert at getting people to work together.

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*("Allow Me To Share My Thoughts" continued from page 3)*

***What are your HRQB/OHRE current projects?***

We have several projects going on right now; this is our foundation phase. The things we are currently working on are critical to our long range goals. Our current focus areas are:

- Provide better tools and resources to our HRAs
- Establish a formal Mentoring Program at each wing
- Initiate State Assistance Visits
- Restructure the Human Resource Quality Board (HRQB)

We are also in the process of establishing several virtual teams to work on the ANG Diversity Initiatives as well as the creation of a robust and dynamic website that will increase the effectiveness of our communications with the field.

***What is OHRE's strategy for implementing diversity in the future?***

First, I think we have to come to terms with the fact that the old diversity paradigms of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century will not suffice in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century world of increasing complexity and rapid change. Our ideas of diversity as race, gender, education level, and the other common aspects of diversity will not be as relevant as we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Instead 21<sup>st</sup> Century diversity in the military will focus on thinking styles, being able to operate in a joint environment, understanding emotional intelligence, and developing the skills to operate and flourish in an asymmetric environment with multiple threats. Second, we need to reassess and improve our OHRE processes and clarify the duties and responsibilities of our office and those of the wing and state HRAs. And last, we must develop a strategic template for human performance and diversity that each state and Wing can modify to fit their unique requirements and cultures. Our strategy is to push the "power to the edge." We will empower the HRAs by promoting the idea that "one size doesn't fit all," provide the tools and resources necessary for them to achieve their goals, and instill a performance-based culture. We also need to ensure that all of us, whether it is HRAs, the OHRE, or the HRQB, are at the end of the day engaged in activities that add quantifiable value to the ANG. In these days of shrinking budgets and fewer workers, it is essential that all of our activities are measurable and tied directly to mission readiness and accomplishment.

***What strategic focus areas will the new plan contain?***

Our new plan will contain primarily the same focus areas as the Human Capital plan framework that was developed by the President and OPM. All federal agencies are using basically the same framework with slight modifications to better fit their needs. Specifically, our plan will include the following areas:

- Leadership
- Execution
- Innovation
- Organization
- Talent
- Partnerships

Our plan is holistic in nature because it can be applied at all scales of the organization. You can apply these focus areas to yourself for individual improvement, to your section, or to the larger organization. Furthermore, this plan can be utilized as the guiding light for any required change intervention.

At a later date I will share with you the genesis of our approach, but for now I will give you a quick summary. Our approach is based on a biological view of the organization. In the past, most views of the organization were based on a mechanistic mindset. In other words, people generally viewed their organizations and their world as a machine. This was highlighted by the old motion and time studies that were used to determine the number of personnel required for a particular task. However, over the years experts across all the disciplines of the social, physical, and organizational sciences adapted a biological model of the world as a more accurate representation of how the world really operates. This view of the world has been termed Complexity Science or theory. The organizational or society aspect of complexity is called a Complex Adaptive System or CAS. The CAS view of the organization is the lens through which we will apply the focus areas we previously listed.

As stated earlier, our focus areas were in some part adapted from OPM and a groundbreaking five-year study called the Evergreen Project. The details of this study are described in a book called, "What Really Works" by William Joyce, Nitin Nohria, and Bruce Roberson. Their study was the most exhaustive study every completed on the factors critical to organizational success. The management practices that they identified are listed as our focus areas and are considered the six dimensions of any organizing or change process. If you want to read more about our approach to Diversity and Human Performance visit our website at [ANGDiversity.org](http://ANGDiversity.org).

## LETS WELCOME CMSGT DERRIK ALLEN

**(Our new Human Resources Advisor Program Manager)**

Greetings to all! I am CMSgt Derrik Allen, the ANG Human Resources Advisor Program Manager. Let me begin by saying that it is an honor for me to be a part of the "Diversity Initiative" as a change agent! Who am I? I have 20 years of active duty with the Air Force and Air National Guard and have been assigned to the ANGRC/NGB since 1985. My previous assignments include ANGRC First Sergeant, and executive non-commissioned officer to the Director, ANG.



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(*"Let's Welcome CMSgt Derrik Allen" continued from page 4*)

My most recent assignments were Chief, Military Human Resources Division and Chief, Support Group for the Office of the Director, ANG.

Since my appointment as the Program Manager, this past March 2003, many voiced concerns to me about tools and techniques the Office of Human Resources Enhancement (OHRE) could offer to assist the Human Resources Advisors (HRAs) with implementing the diversity initiative. We listened! We charged a group of HRA's and master educators to come up with tools and techniques that could be incorporated into the current course curriculum. We produced enough material that could extend the current one-week course to four weeks.

In the near future, I plan to meet with the Regional HRAs to review and provide comments to the recommended curriculum. If we all agree with its structure and outline, we will present it to everyone. Our plan is to resume training classes in January 2004. I am also working diligently to get the revised ANGI 36-2110, *The ANG Human Resource Advisory Program*, published and out to the units. CMSgt Ron Smith, my predecessor, has done an outstanding job with the HRA program. My challenge is to take the program to a higher level.

Hopefully, my schedule will allow me to visit and meet with all of the HRAs to discuss issues and provide as much assistance to the diversity initiative that I can. I want to personally thank five special people for their unwavering and dedicated support they provided to the diversity and HRA program. They are the HRA Regional Representatives: CMSgt Angela Jones, Region 1; CMSgt Teresa Clark, Region 2; CMSgt C.D. Smith, Region 3; CMSgt Robert Wagner; Region 4 and CMSgt Ricardo Thurston, Region 5. CMSgt's Pelley, Clark and Thurston will be stepping down this year as Regional Representatives. Please join me in thanking them for a job well done! Again, I am very honored to serve and look forward to the challenge!

## HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

By: Maj Gen Juan Garcia

As we commemorate Hispanic Heritage month, I would like to start with a brief perspective of how I view the celebration of Hispanic Heritage month. First I commend the Air National Guard and DOD Leadership for their initiative in celebrating and actively participating in Hispanic Heritage month. For us Hispanics in the Armed Forces, this should be an occasion to remember and recognize the Hispanics who have served our country with pride and honor-many of which have made the



ultimate sacrifice of dying for their country. There are 38 Hispanics (more than any other ethnic group) who, for their valor and gallantry, have been awarded the Medal of Honor. To them we give our most sincere respect and admiration. This is my hope that as we celebrate Hispanic heritage month. We're looking forward to a time when our society will not need to be reminded of the extensive and great accomplishments of Hispanics or members of any ethnic group, race or gender in particular. We'll only reflect on the accomplishment of each and every American. As stated by Ms. Liliana James: "We know that we have reached the pinnacle of success in Diversity, when the noteworthy accomplishments of a member of a minority will not be newsworthy."

On the other hand, as Mr. Charles Able, Assistant Secretary of Defense, very clearly points out: "Our fellow Americans don't know much about the more than 460-year history of Hispanics in North America." There could be several reasons, but the observance of Hispanic Heritage month raises the information level of all citizens regarding the contributions of Hispanics to the nation's history and its defense. Those of us who are members of the Armed Services don't seek special status or treatment; our goal is to get equal and fair treatment. We want the opportunity to excel in our chosen career field. This means that we will work hard to overcome any and all barriers that we may encounter. Our Hispanic culture is composed of people of many origins. You could be of Mexican, Venezuelan, Peruvian, Puerto Rican and many other origins, but we're all Hispanics. In saying this I do so with somewhat of a concern. Recently I have heard that some of us have been discussing whether we should be called Hispanics or Latinos.

I have also read many good positions defending as to why one or the other is preferred. Both positions can be very well justified, but if I may do so, I respectfully suggest that we concern ourselves with other more pressing issues that are affecting us Hispanics or Latinos. While some would want to discuss this further, I will delve into what I consider the message we need to get out to everyone across the country. "We're all Americans with pride in our ancestry." Education will be key to our success. Hispanics have a most difficult situation in this area. Hispanics are by far the most disadvantaged amongst our public school students. The dropout rate is atrocious; it's about three times the rate of African American and Anglos. Only about 55 percent of Hispanics 25 years and older have completed their high school education compared to 84 percent for Anglos and 76 percent for African Americans. Yes, the challenges we face are daunting, but they're not insurmountable. Believe me; today educational gains are being made. Enrollments are on the rise and dropout rates are beginning to stabilize and improve. Now, we cannot sit around and wait for an opportunity to come to us. I recently read about a Marine Master Sergeant who joined the "Corps" because his sister, who had already joined, enticed him to do the same. He made it a career; but his pride in the Armed Forces, the opportunity it gives to Hispanics, and his devotion to mentoring his children, reached its peak when his two daughters were accepted and attended the US Naval Academy in order to become Marine Officers. This is what some may call taking advantage of being a part of this "Land of Opportunity". I call it "the opportunity to excel in your chosen career".

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Let me tell you about five young men from Puerto Rico. They entered the University of Puerto Rico AFROTC program, graduated during a four-year period, and went on active duty. During that period, the UPR AFROTC commissioned around 40 young Lieutenants. Of the five, two stayed and made the Air Force a career, and became Wing Commanders. One of them became a Commander of a B-52 and KC-135 wing when airplanes had a lot less flying hours than they do now.

The other three went on to have civilian careers. One as an Attorney, one as an airline pilot, and the third is in corporate business. All five had something in common, they're pure Hispanics who were able to get a college education with some sacrifices, but from then on, took advantage of the opportunities given by the USAF and the ANG. They went on to become General Officers. Sure they made a lot of sacrifices in order to meet the career requirements of being qualified for promotion. To them the Air National Guard provided a career path unencumbered by any barriers because of their ethnicity.

The University of Puerto Rico AFROTC program has commissioned (before and after that specific four-year period) several others who went on to become General officers. I only mention the five who graduated in this four-year period because it is very unusual for five graduates of an AFROTC unit to become general officers. This started many years ago when the US Armed Forces had not fully recognized the benefits of Diversity. Today, the sky is the limit for Hispanics wanting to reach for the "Stars" in the Air National Guard and the Air Force.

Hispanics have served very well in the US Armed Forces—from the War of Independence, to the most recent events in Iraq. I figure that every year for this celebration you're reminded of those who merit special recognition. If I had to just mention one name, I would have to recognize Lt. General Mario Sanchez, the Commander of US troops in Iraq. Having been assigned to such a difficult and key position in the US Army clearly is recognition of his military professionalism and high esteem which he holds in the Department of Defense. My respect goes to him as a soldier and a Hispanic. May he bring the situation to an improved status where the lives of our fellow military can be spared.

Now, let me get back to actual times which some of you might say is your specific reality and interest. The Air National Guard has most definitely changed, and for the better. If you're good at what you do, you'll be recognized and encouraged to continue to excel. There are, however, certain steps you can take to improve your career and promotion opportunities. As a good friend of mine once said, "We cannot try to make it a career of being a minority." You have to further your education, be it the professional military education, taking college courses for a degree, or post-graduate courses for an advanced degree. Please don't tell me it can't be done.

Many members of the ANG have completed an undergraduate degree at night. Others have completed a Graduate Degree or Law School, etc. while maintaining a civilian job. Yes, while also pursuing a civilian career you have to complete all the PME requirements for promotion. No, you don't get waivers because you're busy with the family and civilian job. Sure this also takes a lot of time, effort and sacrifice, but it can be done. You need to carefully balance family life, civilian career, ANG duties, PME, and undergraduate and graduate school. It can be done.

One very important step that I encourage you to take is to get yourself a mentor. That mentor does not have to look like you. He or she can be an Anglo, an African American, Asian, etc. It doesn't matter as long as they're interested in helping guide your career.

To those senior officers and NCOs who read this, please make it a point to become mentors. Even if you're not asked, offer your time and efforts to mentor those in your unit who are less experienced. It may be a challenge for you and for them, but the results will make you both proud.

Recently, I was reading a review of a book by Charles Moskos and John Sibley, entitled "All That We Can Be." Moskos and Sibley state, "that the Army is the most successfully integrated institution in the Nation." The one point that I found most interesting and quite valid was when they mention the following: "institutions that lower standards to promote less qualified individuals quickly achieve the desired levels of Diversity." "The long-term costs are resentment from white males and the loss of self-esteem from the minorities and females who are made to feel that they cannot succeed without the special favors. "Instead of lowering the standards, the Army trains them up to standards."

No doubt about it, we in the Air Force "train our people up to standards, and this has been done throughout our military history." We also coach and mentor our people so they meet the desired standards. Once they meet the standards, they can be selected for added responsibility and promotion.

In the Air National Guard everyone, regardless of ethnicity, is given the opportunity to reach the desired level of success. The only difference is that because you're Hispanic, the mentor may not look like you, or come from your same background. This will not be a barrier when the mentor sees your desire to overcome any educational or other type of barrier. Rest assured that a good mentor will either help you or have someone that has the needed skills to assist you.

I must speak briefly about Diversity and Mentoring in the Air National Guard. The Senior Leadership is very concerned about our Diversity as we try to have our units reflect the communities in which we serve. Well, we have yet to achieve the desired level of success, but we're making strides. How are we doing this? By holding the unit leadership accountable for the results.

We have one state; Tennessee, where we have African Americans and females in very senior leadership positions.

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This was the direct result of the dedication of their leadership to diversity and their mentoring of those qualified who had the desire to excel. There are others who have done quite well and some are working very hard to improve their performance. In the ANG we measure many things in our Diversity efforts. Amongst those are promotion rates, mentoring, career opportunities, and even the particular AFSCs of the diverse groups. Our most difficult one has been the “Operations” career field. Yes; the ANG has been tracking and pursuing flying career opportunities for females and minorities to insure they grow. This is one of the areas where the ANG Senior Leadership has placed added emphasis, so that we can attempt to mirror our communities as we strive in all career fields. As we celebrate Hispanic Heritage month, let’s not make it the Flavor of the Month. Dr. Samuel Betances, ANG Diversity consultant, Army National Guard, and the Air Force has stated that Diversity is:

- More than a compliance issue.
- It goes far beyond looking at numbers and targets.
- It seeks and accepts people’s differences that will enhance our combat capability.

We seek to eliminate that so called “Glass Ceiling” so that we can develop the talents of all members of the Total Air Force for upward mobility as a policy imperative. You need to develop the talents of all the members so you can have them in the pipeline for advancement and promotion. With these thoughts I wanted to

give a somewhat different message than that of just celebrating Hispanic Heritage month. My goal was to provide thought starters to everyone so that within the scope of your position, you can think out of the box and make strides to insure all that serve in the Air National Guard are given the opportunity to lead and have a viable career path unencumbered by any barriers. As I often state, we’re making history as we fight the enemy in Afghanistan, Iraq and other places. Today we’re also making a different type of history, one that will not go into the history books, but one that our children and grandchildren will benefit from for which no individual gets credit—just the satisfaction that we helped pave the way for others to follow. The Air National Guard is at the Vanguard of mentoring all those who want to excel in their chosen career path. Each and every Hispanic can take advantage of these opportunities and the Senior Leadership of his/her unit will support and motivate them to do so.

## “I LOVE THE U.S.”

By Brett Hayworth, Sioux City Journal staff writer

*Hiliana Suarez-Chancey, 185th Air Refueling Wing senior airman, excitedly shows her citizenship papers to her husband and other friends before proceeding with the naturalization ceremony Friday in the federal court building in Sioux City.*

*(Staff photo by Jerry Mennenga)*



Before she could legally vote, Hiliana Suarez-Chancey already was serving her country, drawing a paycheck from the military. Highly regarded at the 185th Air Refueling Wing of the Iowa Air National Guard, Colombia native Suarez-Chancey became an American citizen on Friday when 28 people took their naturalization oath in Sioux City. It would be nigh impossible for any of the other 27 to take their citizenship as seriously as Suarez-Chancey. She said naturalized Americans are privileged, since they “get to choose” America, unlike citizens born here who may take it for granted. “I love the United States, because this is my home,” Suarez-Chancey said. “I love my country Colombia, I was born there. But this is the country that has given me what my own country never gave me — friends, family, a husband, the possibility of work, the possibility of having a car. If you do right, I don’t see a reason why not to love it.” The ability of Suarez-Chancey to become a U.S. citizen is a testimony to the persistence she has in spades. The final step in her winding road to naturalization — the oral test on history and civics, given this summer — was the easiest, she contends.

The initial step to naturalization is to first be designated a resident, an aspect Suarez-Chancey said was more difficult than the citizenship part. In 1998 she got her residency/green card, which gives a Social Security card and eligibility to work, including serving in the military. One other struggle — twice being denied a is almost impossible,” she said, citing that officials need proof of assets and a job. Through all the visa tribulations, a friend told her to recall three things she liked about America. Suarez-Chancey quickly snapped, “I already did that — I like (singer) Amy Grant, mashed potatoes and gravy.” Suarez-Chancey’s boss at the 185th, Chief Master Sgt. Merlin Thompson, said she demonstrates a great deal of love for the U.S. and the military. “She was willing to go through the rigors of becoming a citizen,” he said. “It is an investment of time and money, as well as exposure to an FBI investigation.” Suarez, chosen 2002 Airman of the Year at the flight/squadron level for the 185th Mission Support Group, “is a supervisor’s definition of the ideal employee,” Thompson said. “Her life outside the 185th is as much a model of hard work and dedication.”

Born in Bogota to a middle-class family, Suarez-Chancey was schooled at a Catholic institution and then finished college. In her early 20s in the late 1980s, “I became a Christian and that totally changed my life,” she said. With the five-year visa obtained, in 1994 she began her journey toward Americanization by joining the California-based Covenant Players religious troupe, journeying to schools and prisons in places like Nova Scotia and Alaska. At first she spoke not one word of English, but memorized her lines in the language. In two years, her commitment with Covenant was fulfilled and she was in Canada mulling what to do next. In a dream she had one morning, “God was telling me that I was going to work in a summer camp. I had no idea what was a summer camp.” That same day she got a call from Mary and Joe Wiltgen of South Sioux City, whom she calls her American “Mom and Dad,” informing her about an opening in the Salvation Army Summer Camp outside Omaha. She took the unpaid Salvation Army job, which provided lodging. Without money but a promise to pay in the future, she hired a lawyer to assist her in obtaining her residency. Due to the abundance of paperwork necessary for

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(*"I Love The U.S. " continued from page 7*)

the Immigration and Naturalization Service to complete this process, the case was dropped. Later when she arrived in Sioux City, with the help of her church, Love and Faith Ministries, she filed again and was successful in obtaining her residency status. "I believe it was a miracle of God," Suarez-Chancey said. "As a resident, I was able to work for the first time, to get a salary, that was pretty good." But "to just become a resident was not good enough for me," so she began thinking about citizenship.

She joined the 185th as a part-timer three years ago. (Activated in April 2003, Suarez-Chancey is on leave from her full-time job at Pech Optical in Sioux City.) She described the thrill "to be able to wear the American uniform." In fall 2001, she married Brian Chancey, who is also a senior airman at the 185th. Those who have residency status have to wait five years before they can become a citizen, three years if they are in the military. She undertook the massive paperwork for citizenship, which has fees throughout, like a \$50 fee for fingerprinting. The FBI does a background check on all applicants and the one-on-one oral test brought steps to a conclusion. Suarez-Chancey didn't miss a single question and said the subject matter was important to know for new citizens. "Once you learn what Vietnam was all about, what Pearl Harbor was all about, how many people died there and all the sacrifices, then you understand the basis and foundation of our country," she said.

Before Judge Don O'Brien Friday in the U.S. Federal Courthouse were several Mexicans, as well as four Vietnamese, two Guatemalans and "only one South American girl, me," Suarez-Chancey said of her compatriots. She had by far the largest contingent of the new Americans, including 15 personnel from the 185th and one of her two brothers. Suarez-Chancey noted "a weird feeling" following the oath, that "I don't know why, but I just feel more free." Having gone through the process the right way, she can't imagine how those choosing the illegal alien route, skulking throughout America afraid to be found out. She has two recommendations for the naturalization process. First, make the oral test more difficult. "It is not really that hard," she said. And when the oath is given, make the new Americans say it all, instead of having an official read off the oath and then the participants responding with a brief, "I do." Said Suarez-Chancey, "I believe that I should be able to say that 'I, Hiliana Suarez, want to be a part of this country and it is an honor, and I will defend the Constitution of the U.S. and I will serve this country.' We should have the right to confess it." Given the chance when none of the other 27 wanted to make a statement about their new status, she stepped up, saying "this is our promised land ... let's do our best to make this nation very proud of us." The response? Said Suarez-Chancey, "They clapped and told me I can run for office."

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